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AUTHOR Britton, Jeanette; And Others
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ABSTRACT

The interdisciplinary unit for seventh grade students, involving art, social studies, and mathematics, focuses on a study of the forms, symbols, designs, and colors of the traditional art form of the Plains Indians, the Medicine Wheel. Objectives of the unit are for students to gain an understanding of the culture of the Plains Indians; to develop skills in using compasses, protractors, and rulers in geometric construction; and to create "personal Medicine Wheel" designs that incorporate ideas resulting from social studies discussions. Background information, materials required, procedures, and activities to accomplish the objectives are detailed. Selected passages from "Seven Arrows," by Hyemeyohsts Storm, a Northern Cheyenne, and ten pages of appended transparency masters (from Leroy Appleton's "American Indian Design and Decoration") showing examples of medicine wheels and design details are the principal resources for the unit. Suggested activities include discussing reading passages, writing essays, creating Medicine Wheel designs by using mathematical concepts and tools and telling stories about completed Medicine Wheel shields. (NEC)

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Medicine Wheels

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THE ART AND CULTURE OF THE PLAINS INDIAN

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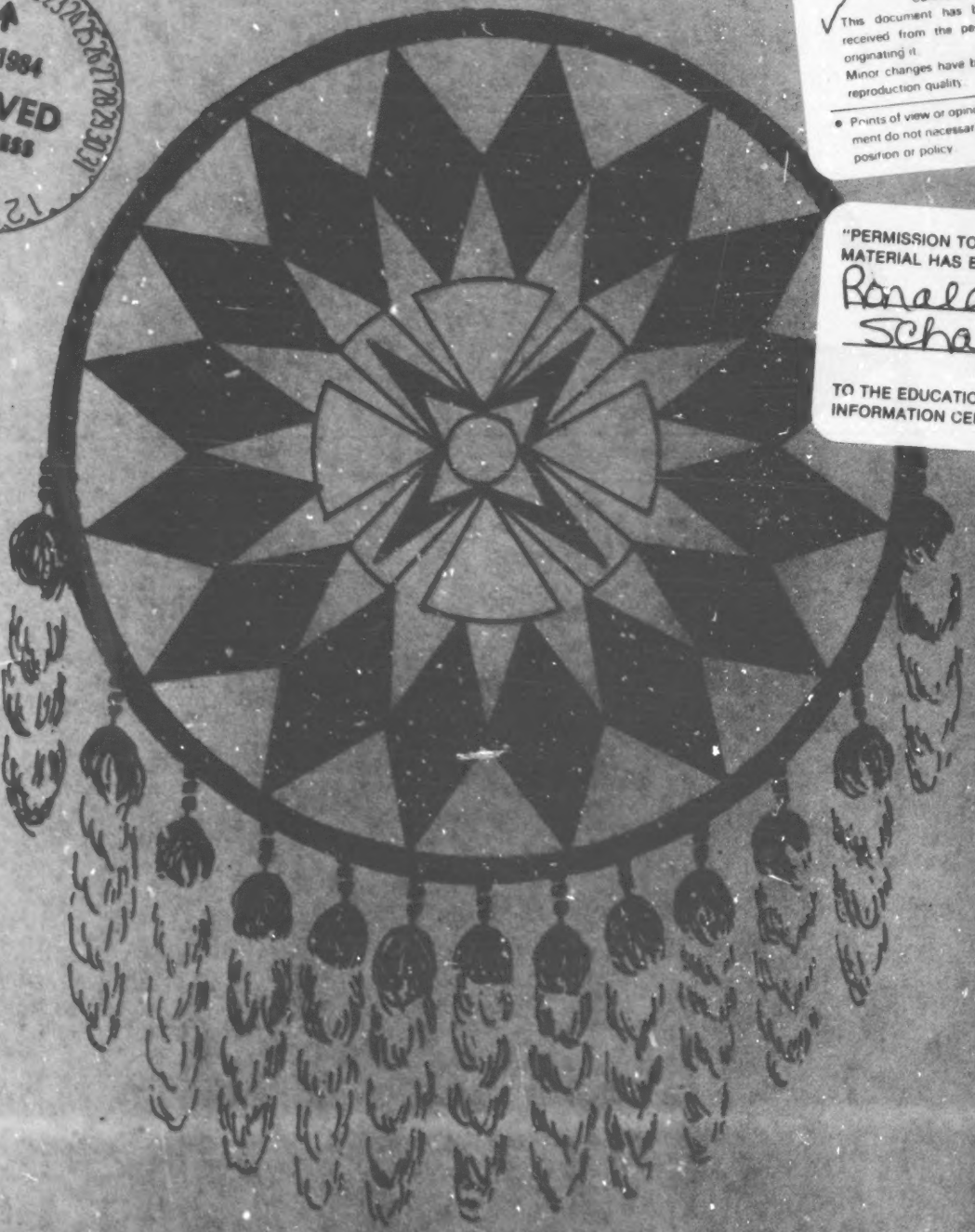

RC014778

MEDICINE WHEELS

THE ART AND CULTURE OF THE PLAINS INDIAN

An Interdisciplinary Unit
for
Seventh-Grade Students
involving
ART
SOCIAL STUDIES
MATHEMATICS

Jeanette Britton
Social Studies
South Shore Middle School

Florence Lindstrom
Art
Nathan Hale High School

Vernon Oshiro
Mathematics
Worth McClure Middle School

Wayne Peterson
Mathematics Office
Secondary Curriculum

MEDICINE WHEELS

THE ART AND CULTURE OF THE PLAINS INDIANS

Introduction

The forms, symbols, designs, and even the colors of Native American Art most often had special significance, frequently of a spiritual nature, to the artists and their people. The Medicine Wheels of the Plains Indians and the Sand Paintings of the Indians of the Southwest are examples of traditional art forms that had deep personal meaning of a spiritual nature. While most of us can gain only a superficial understanding of the importance of such art forms in the cultures of the various Indian tribes, we can certainly appreciate their beauty. We can also use the forms, symbols, designs and traditional colors, along with our imagination and creativity, to guide us in creating artwork of our own.

According to Hyemeyohsts Storm, a Northern Cheyenne, in his book Seven Arrows[1], the story of the Plains Indians must of necessity have the Medicine Wheel as a central focus if we are to begin to understand and appreciate their beliefs and culture. Much of the art of the Plains Indians was incorporated in Medicine Wheel designs on shields - sacred shields, chiefs' shields, and personal shields.

> *Among the People, every person possessed a Shield of one kind or another. . . . They were not made to turn away arrows or bullets, or for people to hide behind. . . Sometimes they were made from the tough hides of bears or buffalo bulls, but more often they were covered only with the soft skins of deer, antelope, coyote, otter, weasel, or even mice. They were hung with eagle plumes, cedar pouches, tassles of animal fur, and many other things. They were also painted with various symbolic figures. . . . All of these different things represented the individual Medicines and clan signs of the (persons) who carried them.*[2]

Seven Arrows is the principal resource for this unit. While thousands of books have been written about the Plains Indians, they have, almost without exception been written by whites and, as a result, from the point of view of an alien culture. Other books that were used as resources, American Indian Design and Decoration by Appleton and A Pictorial History of the American Indian by LaFarge, are two such books. The adopted text for Seventh Grade Social Studies with its meager accounts of the Indian experience in the history of our country was also authored by non-Indians. (It will also not go unnoticed that the writers of this unit are non-Indians.) As long as such materials are kept within perspective, and are not viewed as authoritative *from the Indians' point of view*, they can serve a useful purpose as a source of design ideas and create a measure of sensitivity to the Indian experience as it has evolved in our country.[3]

The only parts of Seven Arrows that are recommended for use in this unit are the introductory sections and the color and black and white plates that depict Hyemeyohsts Storm's shield designs. The body of the book is a narrative interspersed with stories that were passed from generation to generation about which Storm says, ". . . there are many ancient Stories taught to me by my Fathers and Grandfathers. But there are also new stories that I have written from within my own Understanding and Experience." They are meant to teach both the meaning of "The Sun Dance Way" in which the Medicine Wheel plays a prominent part, and to chronicle the trials of the Plains Indians in their struggle to maintain their culture under the onslaught of the "whitemens' ways." While some of these stories (or excerpts therefrom) may

be appropriate to read to students, teachers should be selective since the level of sophistication is, in many instances, too advanced for use with the age group for which this unit is intended. On the other hand, some of the references to the Indians' sense of humour are delightful. Their inability to comprehend the whitemen's "Geessis" and the apparent contradictions they perceived in the whitemen's religion[4], the slaughter of the great buffalo herds upon which they depended for food and shelter (literally starving them from their lands), and the destruction of their culture that was brought about through the whole process of their contact with the whitemen's ways, are graphically described.

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[1] Seven Arrows is, in many respects, of the same genre as Alex Haley's Roots.

[2] From the introduction to Seven Arrows.

[3] The most authoritative work on "primitive" art is usually considered to be Frank Boas' book, Primitive Art. All of the books mentioned are contained in the collection of the Teacher Resource Center as well as a number of school libraries. If help is needed to obtain a copy of any of them for classroom use, teachers should contact the Arts, Social Studies, or Mathematics Consultant (587-3490).

[4] The following is from Pretty Weasel's account of his contacts with the whitemen, Seven Arrows, page 240.

> *More and more of the whitemen came, some for the beaver and others only for talk. The talkers among them spoke of the Medicine Power that was called Geessis. This Geessis was a Power among them, a chief whom they later killed. He was not surprised that they killed him. After they killed him these men decided he was a Power, and they began to like him. He came back as a ghost and even now he walks among them invisible. . . This Geessis is the greatest killer of them all. He kills off all of their enemies. And he rewards those who follow his path with many things. . . These talkers of the Geessis say that it is bad to do many things. And, believe it or not, killing is one of them. But, as clearly as I can understand it, this only means not to kill those who follow the warpath of Geessis. All others are to be feared and killed.*

Objectives Seventh-grade students will gain some understanding of the culture of the Plains Indians and the role of the Medicine Wheel in their culture. (SS)

Students will develop skills in using compasses, protractors, and rulers in geometric constructions. (M)

Students will create "personal Medicine Wheel" designs that incorporate geometric patterns and other design elements suggested by the Medicine Wheel designs of Hyemeyohsts Storm and other sources as well as ideas that occur as a result of their social studies discussions. (A)

Materials Seven Arrows, Hyemeyohsts Storm, Harper and Row Publishers, 1972

American Indian Design and Decoration, Leroy H. Appleton, Dover Publications, 1971

Primitive Art, Frank Boas, Dover Publications, 1955

A Pictorial History of the American Indian, Oliver LaFarge, Crown Publishers, 1956

Plains Indians Location Map (overhead master)

Mathematics supplies: compasses, protractors, rulers

Art supplies: newsprint, 18" by 24" white drawing paper, black butcher paper, tempera paint, brush, scissors, glue

Indian Design and Decoration pages (overhead masters)

Procedures (SS) Teachers should assign sections of the seventh-grade social studies text that deal with the American Indian for reading and discussion. *Students should be asked to discuss whether or not these readings provide a clear and comprehensive picture of the life and times of the American Indian, what happened to them as a result of contacts with the whitemen, and how this might relate to the present efforts of tribes throughout the country to regain a sense of identity, control over their own future, and other current issues as appropriate.*

(SS) Teachers should read excerpts to the students from Seven Arrows.

- *The inside cover flap (see attachment) tells about the author and about how this book came to be written.*
- *Page 1 introduces the reader to the book. Of particular interest is the true names of the tribes involved and the description of the importance of the Medicine Wheel in their culture.*
- *Pages 4-11 should be read to the students with ample time for discussion and clarification of the ideas that are presented.*
- *The stories that follow are part of a "moving novel about the Plains People and their proud but doomed struggle against the white time and its 'Manifest Destiny.'" Excerpts may be appropriate; however teachers should be selective in their choices.*

(SS) Teachers should show the location map of the Plains Indians on the overhead projector (see attached transparency master). Students should be required to know the names of at least six of the tribes (including Cheyenne, Crow, and Sioux) and be able to locate their traditional lands on an outline map.

(SS) Teachers should require students to write an essay that describes their understandings that have resulted from the discussions and includes their perception of the importance of the Medicine Wheel in the culture of the Plains Indians.

(SS) Teachers should have the students discuss the topics of the first (SS) objective in light of what new insights they might have gained through the intervening activities.

(M) Teachers should provide instruction in and opportunities for practicing the techniques of compass and straightedge constructions with particular emphasis on:

- circles and concentric circles of given diameter;
- line segments and angles that are congruent to given segments and angles;
- angle and segment bisectors;
- lines parallel to given lines;
- perpendiculars to given lines/segments both to a point on a line/segment and from a point not on the line/segment.

(M) Teachers should provide opportunities for students to construct angles of given measures using a protractor and to measure given angles using a protractor.

(M) Teachers should provide opportunities for students to use ratio and proportion in scaling problems: e.g., translating designs to designs of the same shape but different size (similar designs).

(A) Teachers should display examples of representative Medicine Wheels/ shields that incorporate geometric design as one design component. *The use of an opaque projector is required to show the color plates from Seven Arrows.*

(A) Teachers will require students to make three small preliminary sketches in pencil of possible "Medicine Wheel" designs. Each design will:

- Have at least one traditional Indian symbol in the composition. *Use attached pages from American Indian Design and Decoration, a copyright free publication, as overhead transparency masters. Display and discuss these, particularly noting which come from the Plains Indians about whom this unit is concerned.*
- The overall design must radiate out from the center of the circle.

- The design must have a border that uses a repeated geometric design.

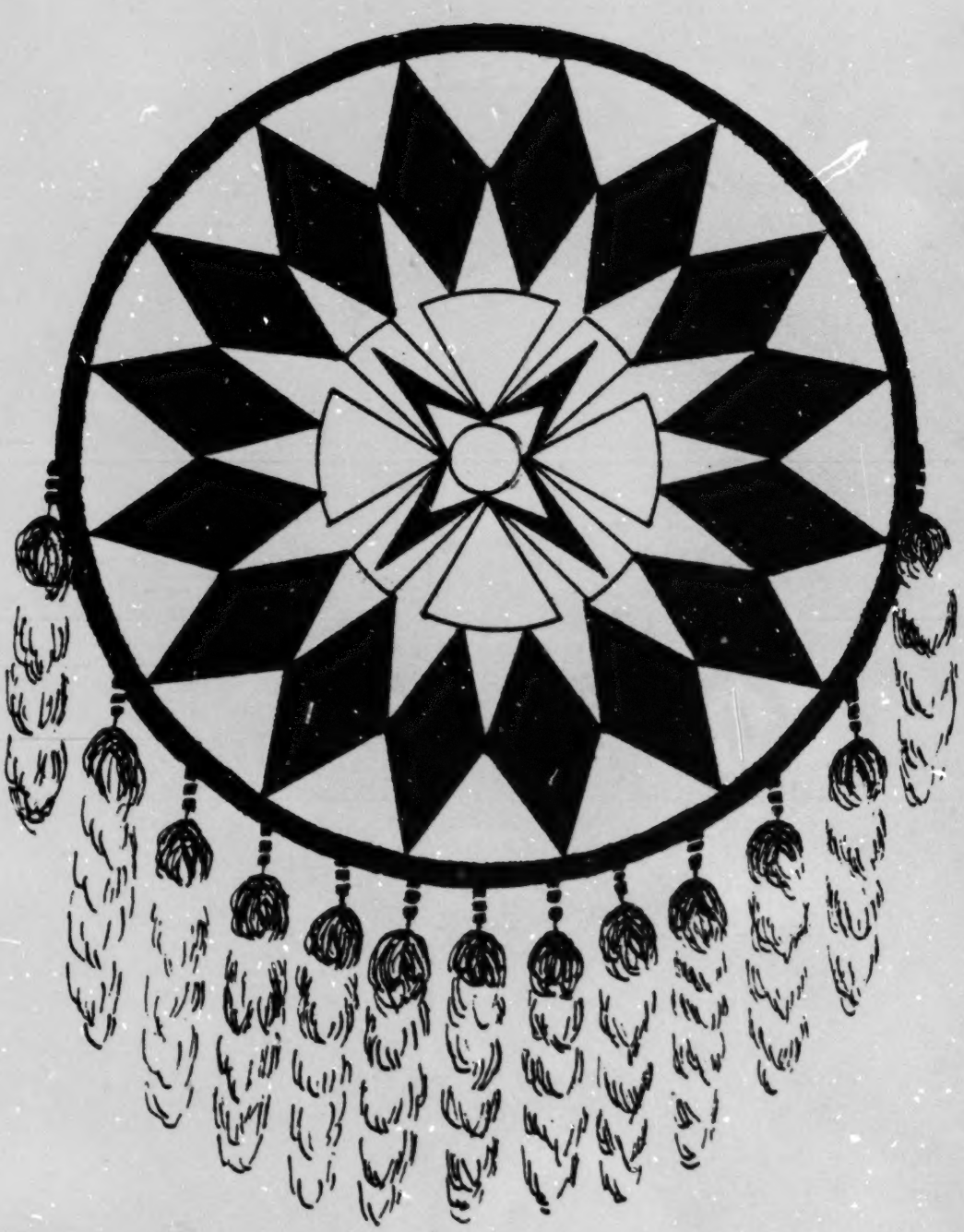
(A) Teachers will instruct students to each select his/her favorite design and enlarge it to fit an 18"-diameter predrawn circle on a sheet of white drawing paper.

(A) Teachers will discuss with students the use of color. *The usual colors associated with Indian art are brown, red, black, white and ocher; however, in Seven Arrows, reference to the use of other colors occur, each time with a special meaning attached. Teachers may wish to read the account of the "Shield of Two Moon," pages 200-202, Seven Arrows and to show the plate on the following page. The colors blue, red, green, and yellow are featured in this design with ocher as a background. Since each student's shield is intended to have personal meaning to him/her, it is suggested that the only guideline for the use of particular colors is that each should be chosen to enhance such meaning. (Note also the steps in creating the "Shield of Two Moon" design, pages 200-201.)* Teachers will provide students with the necessary instructions in the use of tempera paint and instruct them to complete the design by painting it with their chosen colors.

(A) Upon completion of the design, teachers will have each student cut his/her design out and mount it on a large sheet of black butcher paper. Students may paint, cut out, and attach feathers (or other ornamentation - see page 9, Seven Shields) as shown in the "Shield of Two Moon" design, to complete the poster.

Note: Art teachers should make use of the Mathematics skills as identified in the (M) objectives to the extent possible.

(SS,M,A) Teachers should provide opportunities for students to "tell the story" of their personalized "Medicine Wheel" shields.



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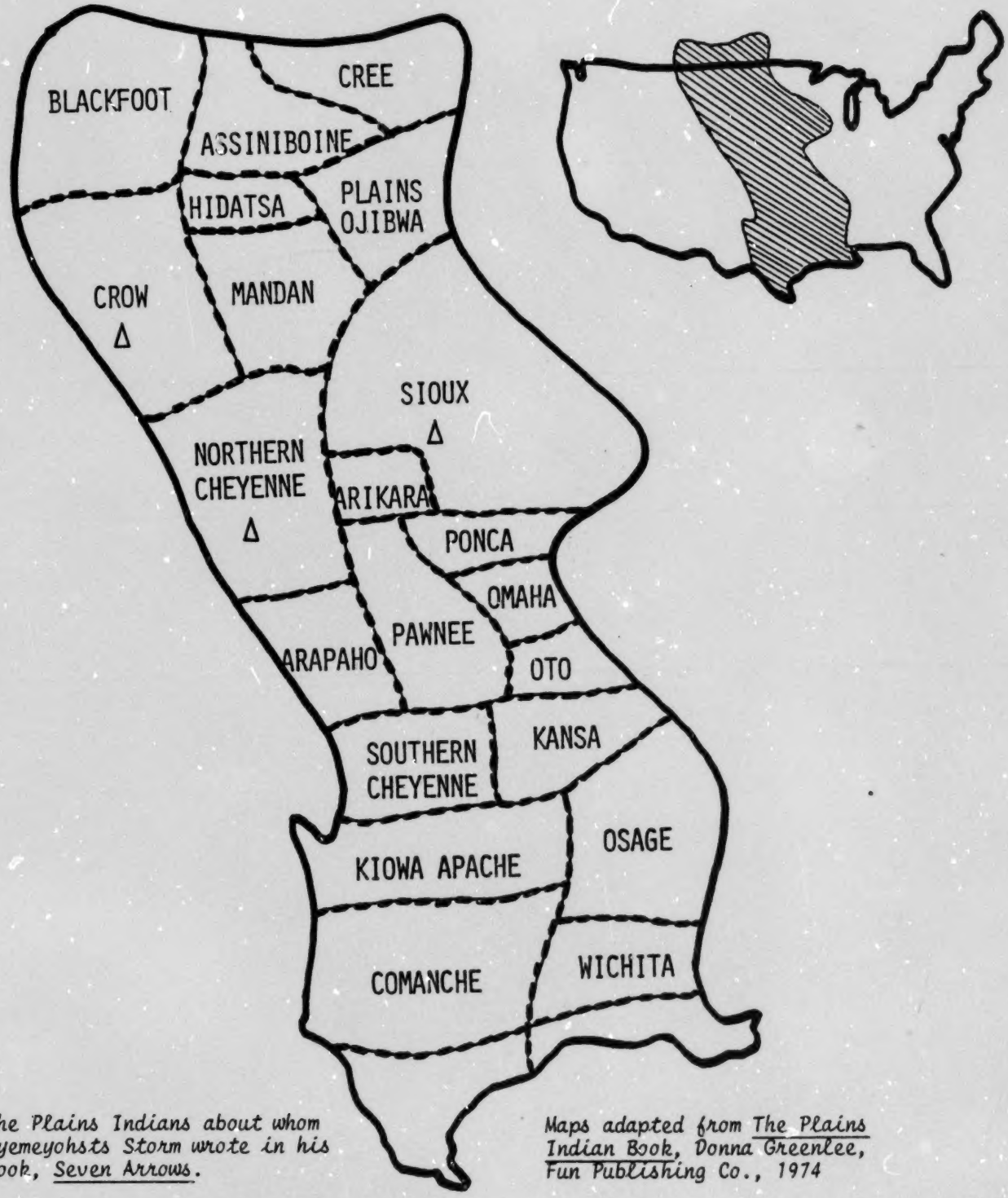

Δ *The Plains Indians about whom Hyemeyohsts Storm wrote in his book, Seven Arrows.*

Maps adapted from The Plains Indian Book, Donna Greenlee, Fun Publishing Co., 1974

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Only eighty-two years have passed since the Indian Wars ended with the Seventh Cavalry's massacre at Wounded Knee Creek of the Sioux village Big Foot had surrendered. Since then, thousands of books have been written about the Plains Tribes, and almost without exception they have been written by whites. A handful, like Neihardt's *Black Elk Speaks*, were written by people whose sensitivity and closeness to the Indian People provided meaningful insights into their way of life. But even these few, because they were written from the viewpoint of an alien culture, were imperfect mirrors of the People and the "Way."

Seven Arrows is the first book about the ancient Ways of the Plains People to be written entirely by an Indian. Hyemeyohsts Storm is a Northern Cheyenne, born on the Lame Deer Agency in Montana. His first teachers were the elders of his tribe. From them he learned about the Sun Dance and the Medicine Wheel, and he was trained by them to be a Shield Maker. He has written *Seven Arrows* to tell us of these things he learned.

Seven Arrows is a book about many things. It is a moving novel about the Plains People and their proud but doomed struggle against the white tide and its "Manifest Destiny."

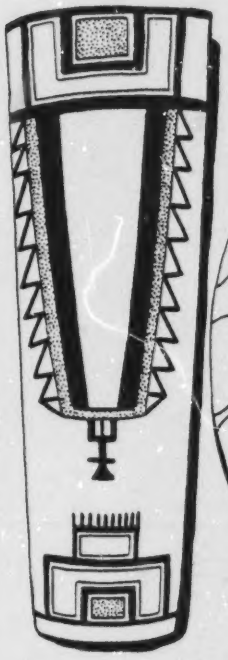
It is also about the Peace Chiefs, Hawk, Night Bear and Green Fire Mouse, and the Brotherhood of the Shields. From their stories we learn to understand the symbolic meaning of the People's Names and Shields, and of the Medicines of the Four Great Directions. We learn too of the centrality of the Vision Quest.

But at its core *Seven Arrows* is about the Sun Dance, the Medicine Wheel, and the Sacred Hoop of the People. It is about the equality and brotherhood of all the Earth's creatures and the Great Balancing Harmony of the Total Universe. It is about *Heamavihio*, the Breath of Wisdom, and *Miaheyyun*, the Universal Understanding. It is a book about the hearts, minds and spirits of all People. It is a Teaching from which we all can learn.

Seven Arrows is the first book in a Series to be published by Harper & Row by American Indian authors. All profits earned by this and subsequent books in the Series will be set aside and used to support special projects designed to aid the Native American People.

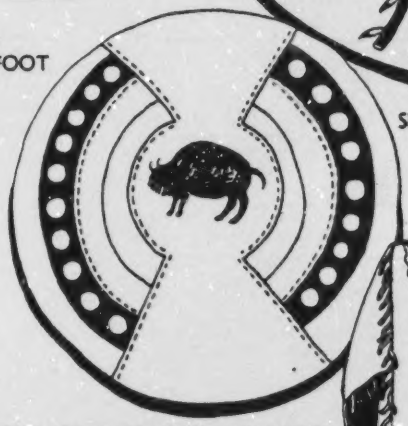
The painting on the front of the jacket is a symbolic Shield designed by Hyemeyohsts Storm and painted by Karen Harris. On the back jacket are photographs of the two sides of an Oglalla Sioux Pipe Bag.

MEDICINE CASE, COMANCHE



MEDICINE CASE, ARAPAHO

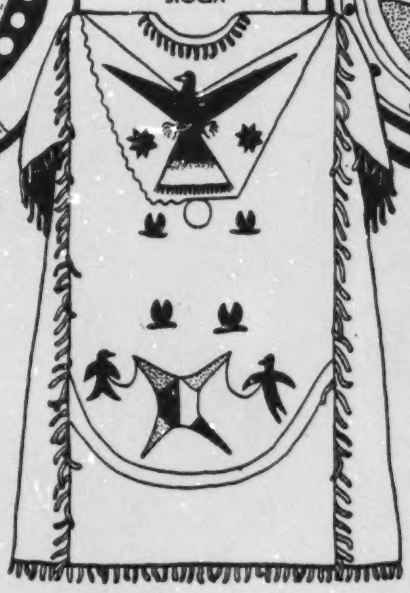
SHIELD
BLACKFOOT



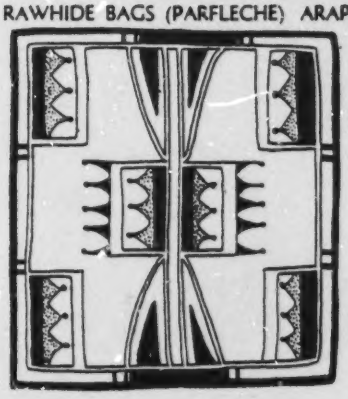
SHIELD COVER, SIOUX

SHIELD COVER
ARAPAHO

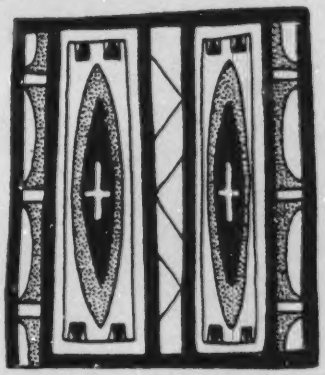
GHOST SHIRT
SIOUX



RAWHIDE BAGS (PARFLECHE) ARAPAHO



ARAPAHO



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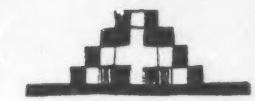
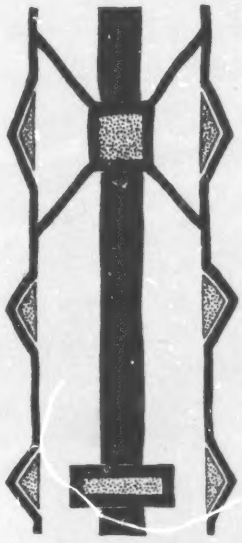
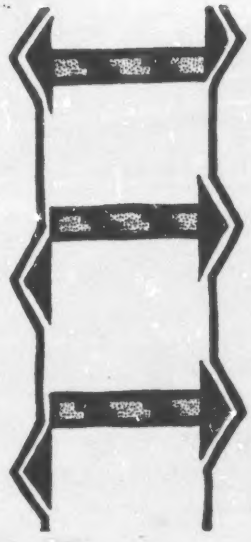
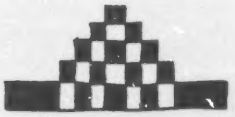
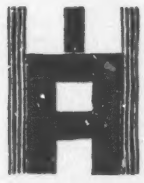
2 THE PLAINS AND THE LAKES











THUNDER-BIRD

SWALLOW

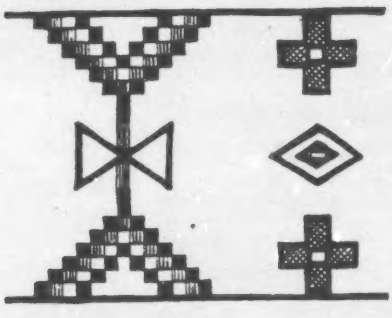
MORNING STAR

TIPI

TURTLE

BUTTERFLY

ARAPAHO



BEADWORK

BUFFALO SKULL

PERSON

SPIDER

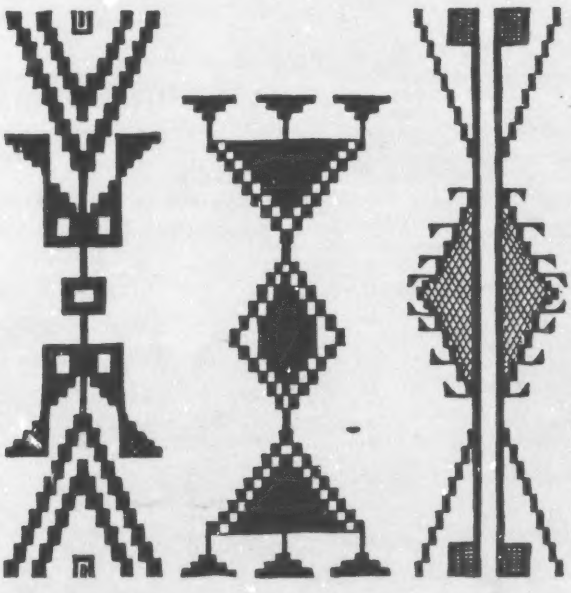
CRICKET

PATH

RIVER WITH ISLANDS

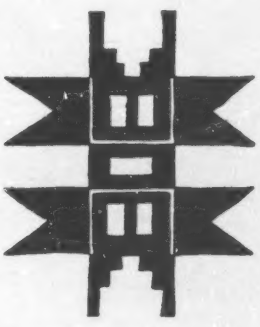
ROCKS

RIVER



TIPI

INTERIOR OF TIPI



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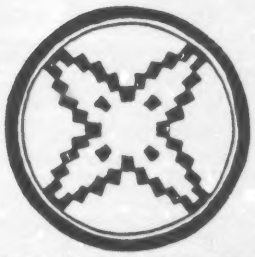
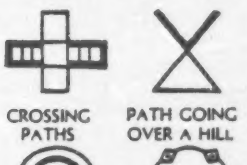


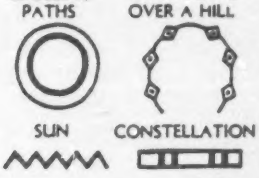
QUILLWORK, BLACKFOOT

PERSON LIZARD

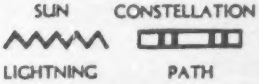
CATERPILLAR BEAR-FOOT



CROSSING PATHS PATH GOING OVER A HILL

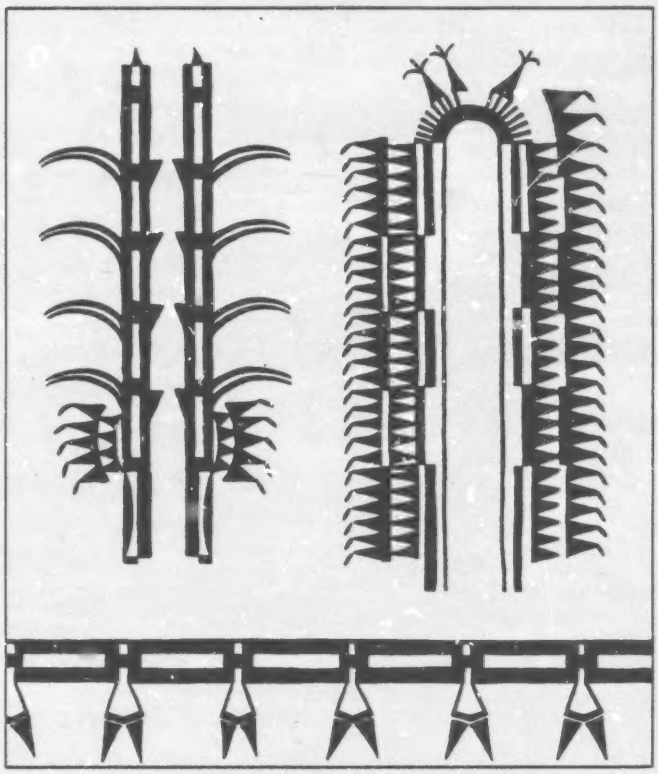


SUN CONSTELLATION

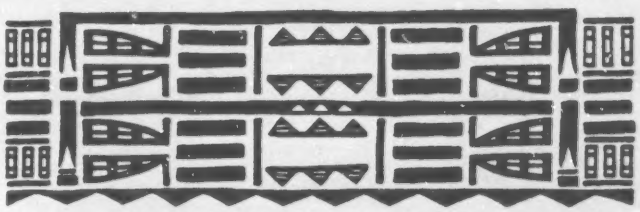


LIGHTNING PATH

ARAPAHO SYMBOLS
(AFTER KROEBER)

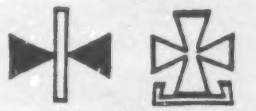


QUILLWORK, BLACKFOOT

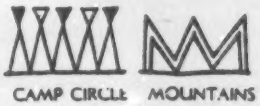


PAINTED BUFFALO ROBE, HIDATSA

QUILLWORK, BLACKFOOT



STAR MORNING STAR



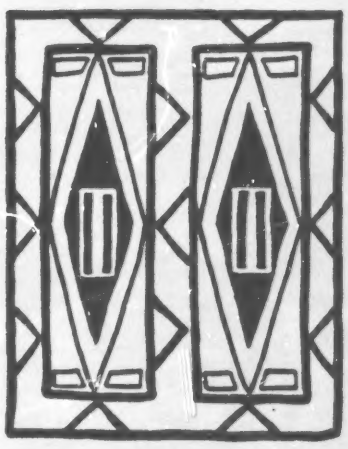
CAMP CIRCLE MOUNTAINS

ARROW-POINT CLOUD

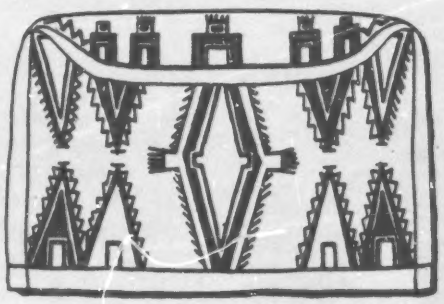
LIFE BEAR-FOOT

PARFLECHE CENTER

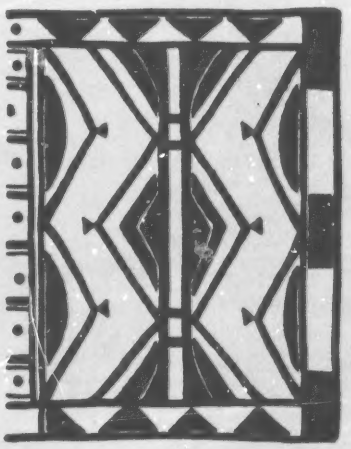
FROM BEADWORK



DAKOTA



COMANCHE
PAINTED RAWHIDE BAGS



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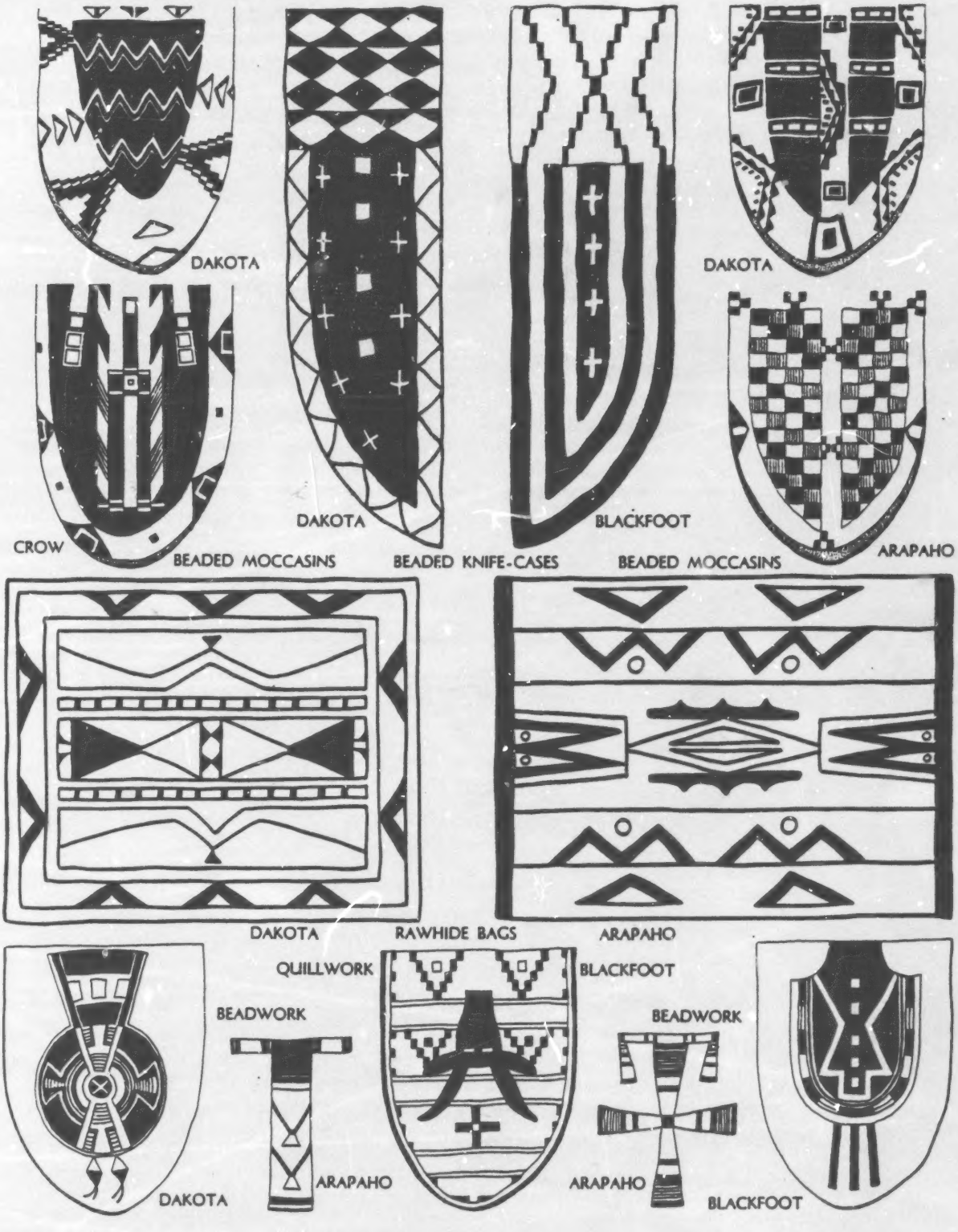

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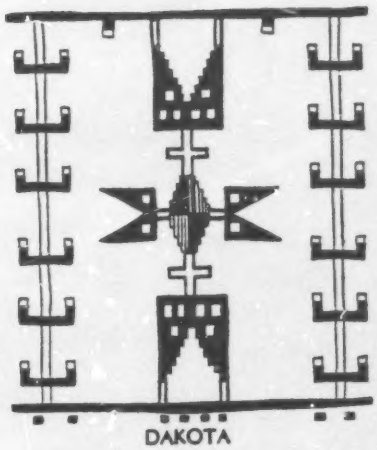

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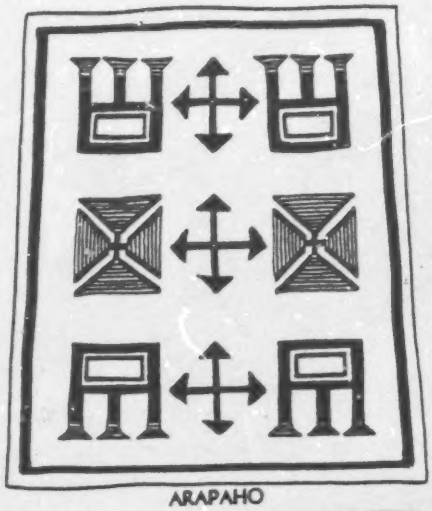

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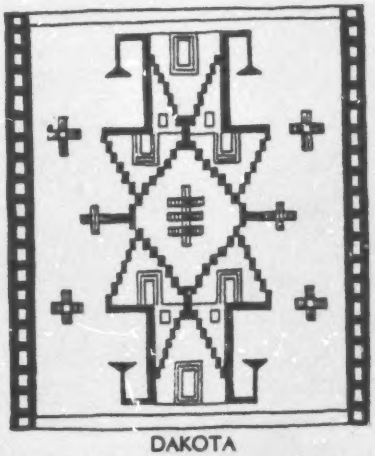

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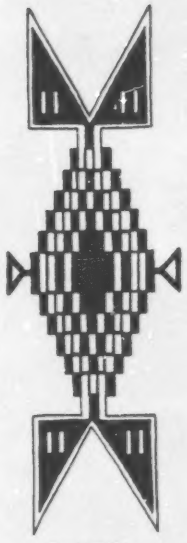

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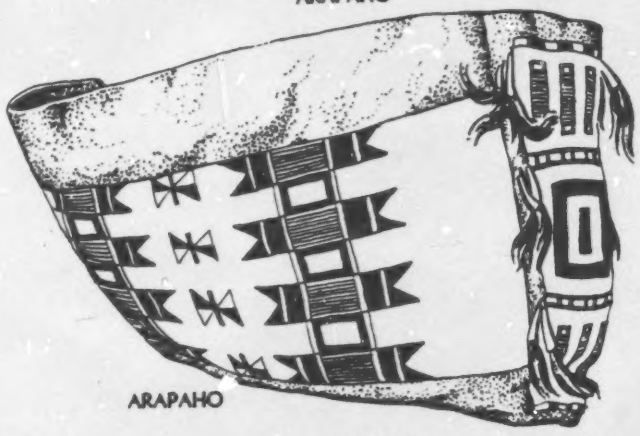

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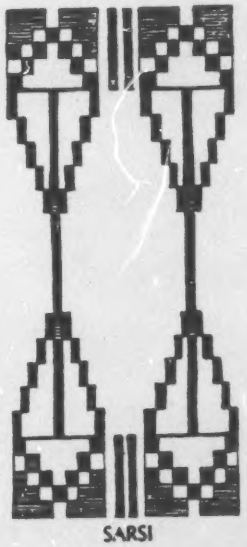

SARSI

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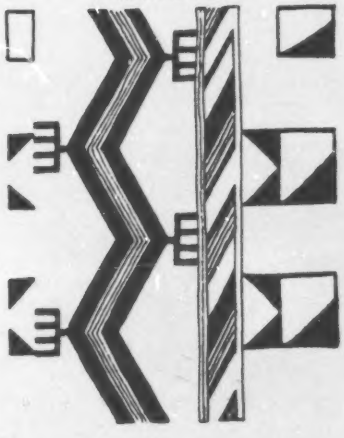

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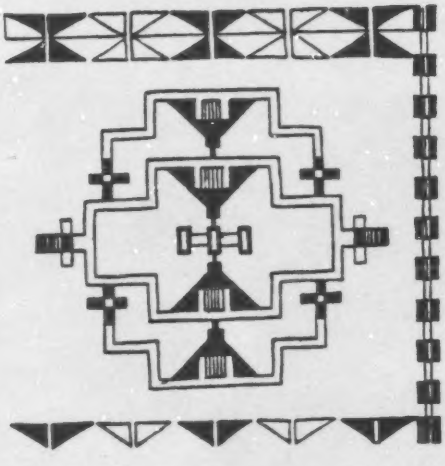

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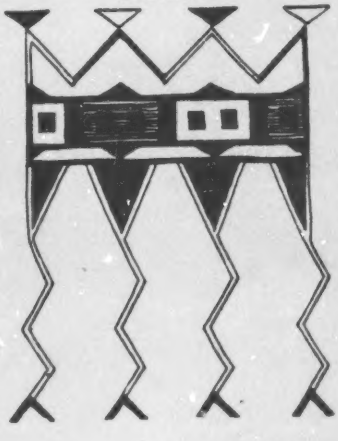

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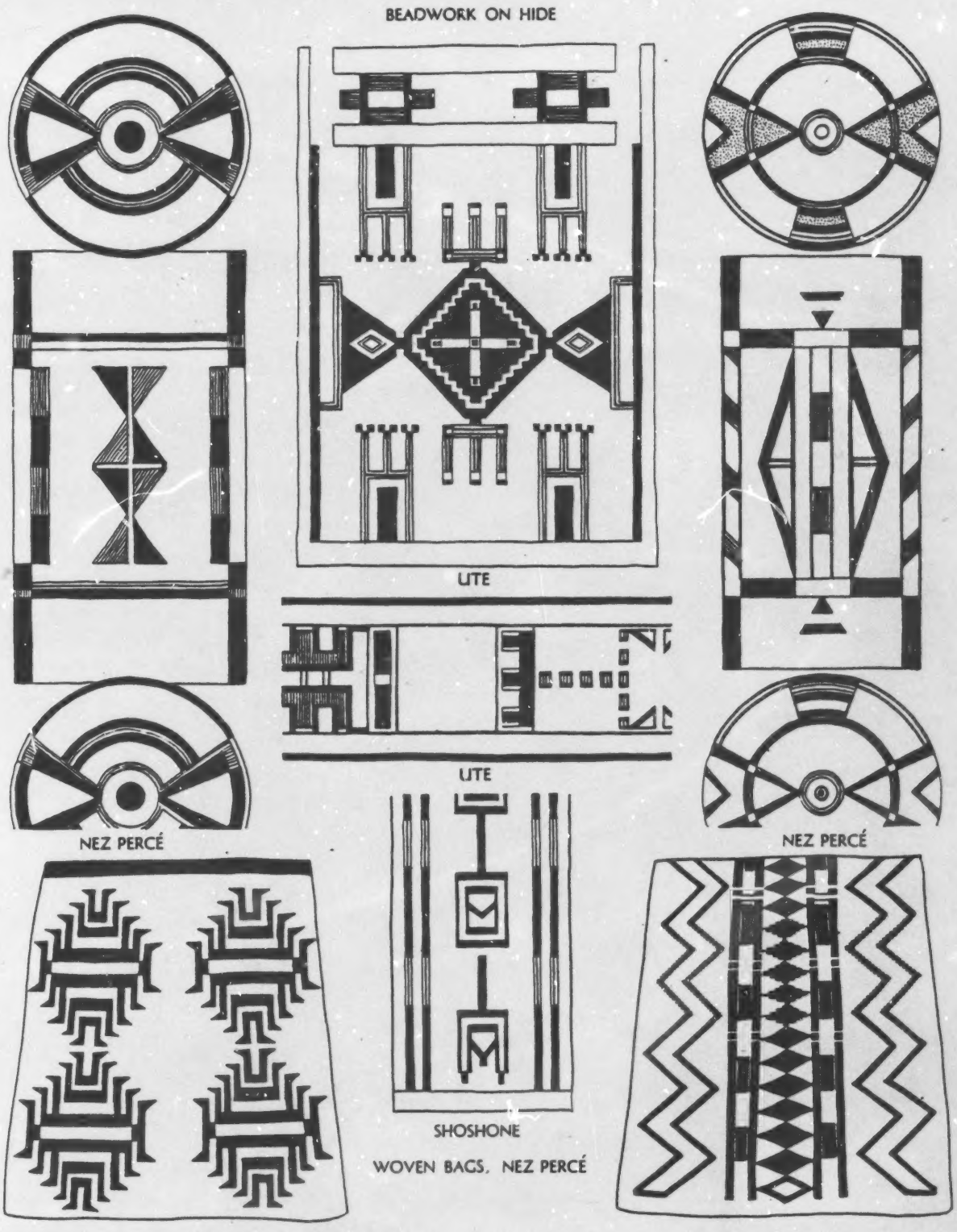

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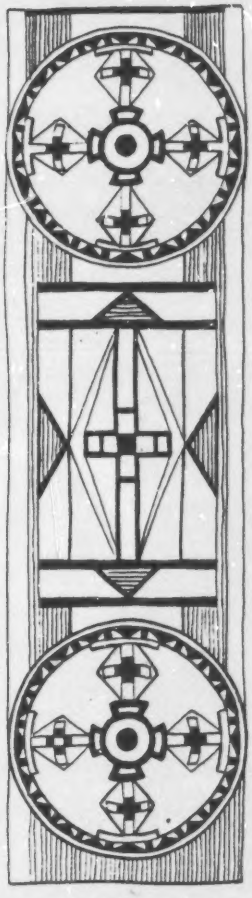

BLACKFOOT

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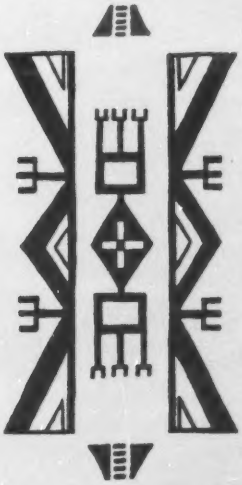

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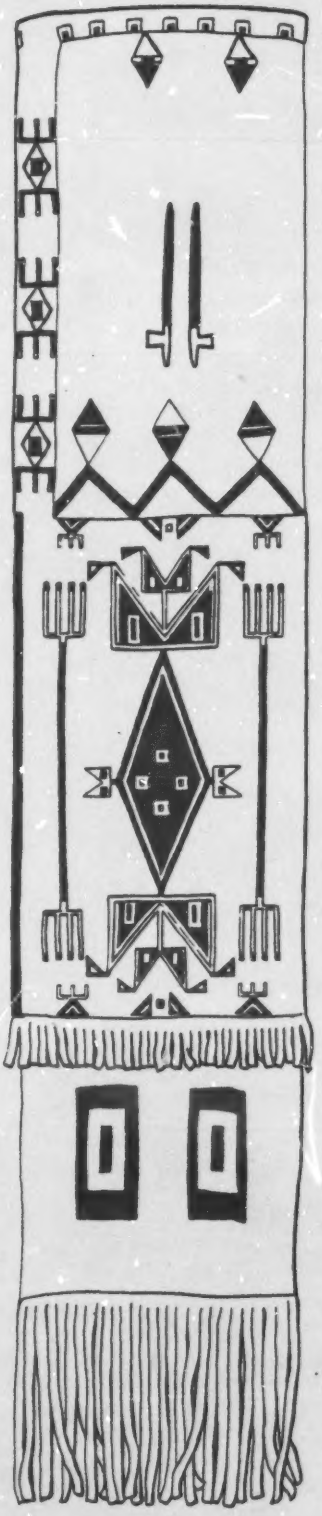
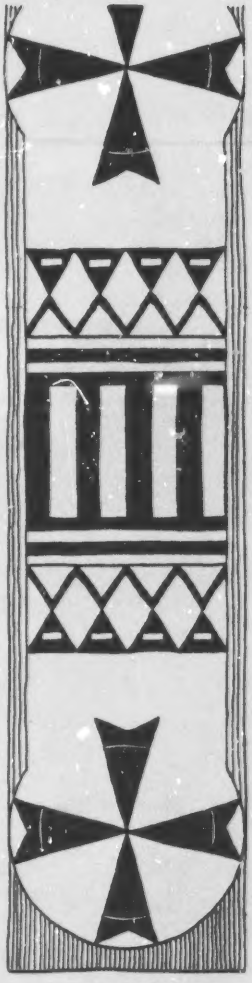


BEADED PIPE BAG, DAKOTA



DAKOTA

CROW

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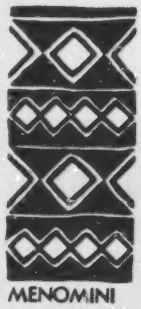
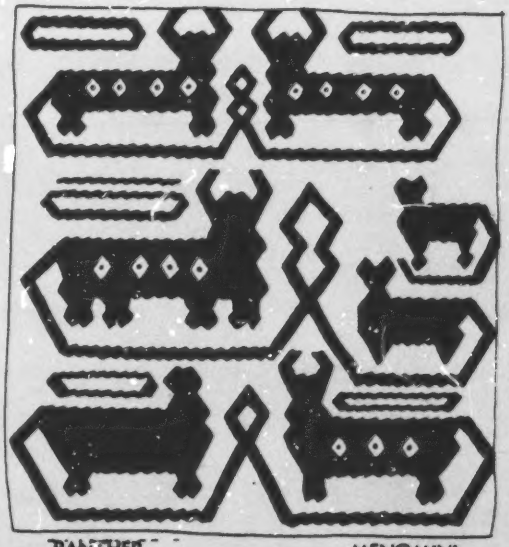
8 THE PLAINS AND THE LAKES

MENOMINI THUNDER-BIRD



MENOMINI

POTAWATOMI

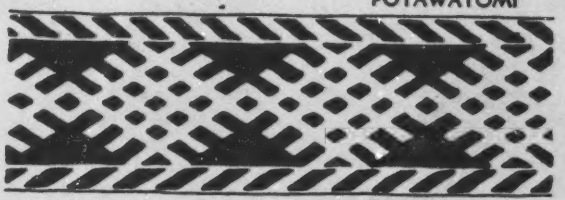


PANTHER MENOMINI

OJIBWAY

POTAWATOMI

OJIBWAY



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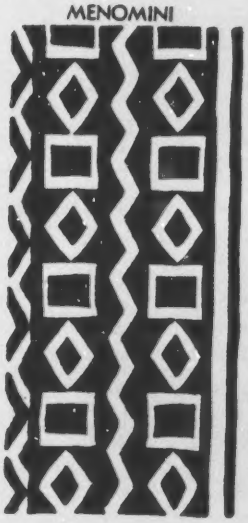
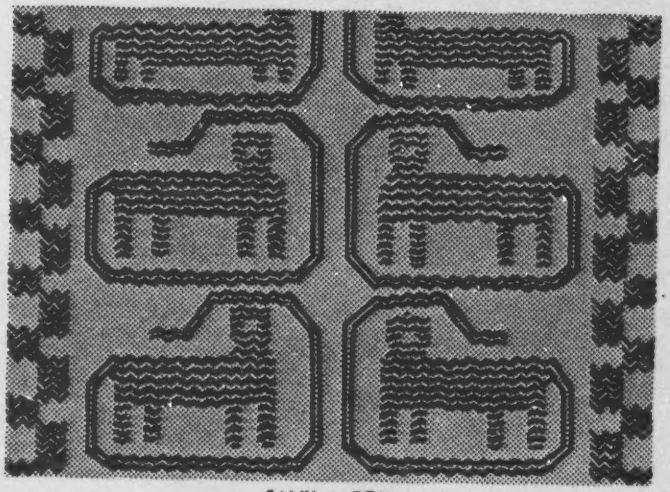
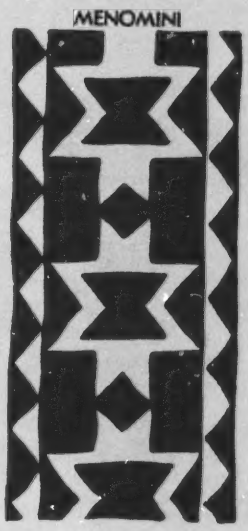


WOVEN BAGS



SAUK & FOX

MENOMINI



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